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## Whither Britain in 2007?

No one can answer such a question with confidence. All we can do is consider where we are at the moment and where current trends point to.

This article is being written on the day after more than 200 people were slaughtered in Baghdad, most in a series of co-ordinated bomb attacks, and just a few days after it was announced that a record 3700 had met a violent death in October as a result of the lawlessness that is sweeping Iraq, in spite of the efforts of American and British forces to bring that troubled country to a state of normality. Questions are increasingly being raised about how long, in such circumstances, these forces can remain in the country. And, nearer home, the head of British security organisation MI5 has announced: “My officers and the police are working to contend with some 200 groupings or networks, totalling over 1600 identified individuals – and there will be many we don’t know – who are actively engaged in plotting, or facilitating, terrorist acts here and overseas”.

It is not the purpose of this article to address the military and political questions raised by the current situation. But, leaving aside the position in the USA, one matter should be blatantly obvious to every observer: as the British Government endeavours to discharge its responsibilities at home and abroad, it steadfastly refuses to acknowledge the hand of God. Likewise, the media, and the British people as a whole, refuse to acknowledge God’s existence and His overruling providence in the events that affect the nation. It seems inconceivable that any government minister today would suggest prayer – particularly prayer to the true God – as an appropriate response to our present difficulties. Even if the threat to our nation were very much more serious than it is, it would no doubt be deemed absurd to call for a national day of prayer to plead for peace in Iraq, for the safety of our troops there and in Afghanistan, and for protection from home-grown terrorists. After all, it might disturb the followers of false religions if an exclusively-Christian event were suggested by the Government. And perhaps opposition from prominent atheists – reflecting the militancy of irreligion in today’s Britain – would be even more vocal.

But it is no light sin to ignore God; the Bible describes as a fool the one who has “said *in his heart*, There is no God” (Ps 14:1). But those who openly deny the existence of a divine Creator display an even more rebellious attitude. The wicked is condemned because “through the pride of his countenance, [he] will not seek after God” and because “God is not in all his thoughts” (Ps 10:4). Today there is no doubt a particularly serious degree of pride behind the refusal of almost a whole generation to seek after God, and acting as if He did not exist. This is not to deny that significant numbers accept God does exist. But in practice they ignore Him; they refuse to seek after Him; He is nowhere in their thoughts. Their hearts never go out to Him in prayer; only in the most desperate emergency might they cry for His help.

But God most certainly does exist, and we would do well to echo the words of Moses the man of God: “From everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God” (Ps 90:2). He is the eternal Being to whom we, our rulers and all the peoples of the world must give account at last for everything we have done – and not least for our attitude to Him.

The One who made the world, and everything in it, is in control of all that is happening, whether our rulers are prepared to accept this or not. “Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,” asked Isaiah the prophet, “and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?” (Is 40:12). We are clearly directed here to the almightiness of Jehovah, the true God, who has a real existence and before whom all His creatures, even “all nations”, “are as nothing” – words which sum up what Isaiah had gone on to direct attention to: “Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, He taketh up the isles as a very little thing.” Great as the empires of the past have been and great as the superpowers of today may be, they are as nothing before the great God of eternity.

Yet today’s leaders refuse to acknowledge the God who, in His providence has given them their place of authority and their moment of fame. And that providence includes everything that happens. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* sums up, in typically-concise fashion, Scripture teaching on the subject: “God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy” (5.1). It is the duty not only of individuals, but also of nations, to acknowledge that God is upholding and governing all He has created. Rulers ought to recognise

that He has everything under His control, including all the matters that He has committed to them to administer – just as He overrules every individual voter’s decision at the ballot box, and all the events that influence such decisions. So rulers ought to seek His help and direction in all that they do – in relation to great events and small.

If God’s favour were measured in terms of gross domestic product and other economic statistics, it would have to be said that we have never had more of His blessing. But it is not so. This is an age when, in God’s judgement, Britain suffers “not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11). And, perhaps more solemnly still, even where the words of the Lord are heard, the power of the Holy Spirit is to a great extent withheld.

What then can we say of 2007? If we look at trends in religion over the past century and a half, we cannot be hopeful. All we can expect is that, over these 12 months, Britain’s spiritual condition will deteriorate further. We certainly deserve nothing better. Indeed, if God deals with us as we deserve, we must expect all kinds of judgements – temporal as well as spiritual.

Yet there remains in Britain “a remnant according to the election of grace”. Thus when, morally and religiously and spiritually, the country is corrupting around them, they act as salt – so that the decay is not total. Each of them is more or less, given to prayer. Sodom itself might have been saved from destruction had there been even ten praying people in the city. And we have the example of Moses, who cried to God in the face of looming judgement against the Israelites: “Pardon, I beseech Thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of Thy mercy” (Num 14:19).

God has not changed. He is the One who brought proud Nebuchadnezzar, the supreme ruler of Babylon (in modern Iraq) to confess that God “doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?” (Dan 4:35). The Lord can act in the same way today; it is not impossible for Him to bring our rulers also to acknowledge God’s providential control of events – and to begin to seek God’s direction in the decisions they must make and to seek His blessing on their policies as they are implemented.

Nor is it beyond God’s power to bring the people of Britain and of other countries to seek Him sincerely. Let God’s children seek earnestly for an outpouring of the Spirit which would bring this about. Let them remember the command: “Keep not silence, and give Him no rest, till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (Is 62:6,7). If the Most High were to give grace to His people so to pray, and if in mercy He were to answer their petitions, 2007 would indeed be a year to remember.

## Religiousness, not Religion<sup>1</sup>

A Sermon by John Bruce

Matthew 19:16-22. *And, behold, one came and said unto Him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And He said unto him, Why callest thou Me good? There is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto Him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto Him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.*

This incident is in itself exceedingly interesting and instructive. But it becomes still more so when we observe its connection in point of time with the subject of the preceding section.

**The freeness of grace.** When little children were brought to our blessed Lord, He used the disciples' objection to make a statement about the absolute sovereignty and freeness of grace. Though given only in substance in this passage, it is opened up more fully by the other evangelists in these words: "Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child [or as an infant receives it], shall not enter therein". A little child cannot be adopted into the redeemed family of God on account of its faith or its repentance or its good resolutions. Neither can it change its dispositions for itself, or illuminate its darkened intellect by any light struck out from the collision of those faculties which are still lying lifeless and powerless, and unconscious of anything unless perhaps existence.

When a creature so helpless receives salvation – or as it is here and elsewhere expressed – "enters into the kingdom of God", it is purely and necessarily and most manifestly a debtor to the sovereignty of grace. No man can confound the agency of God and the agency of the creature here, for the creature is seen to be merely passive. Our Lord's doctrinal statement therefore applies even in maturest manhood, when the creature is furthest of all from being passive. It applies when, instead of being merely the recipient of grace – as the earth receives the dew which falls upon it – all the faculties of

<sup>1</sup>Reprinted, with slight editing, from Bruce's *Sermons*. Bruce (1794-1880) was the Disruption minister of St Andrews, Edinburgh. As a young man, Robert Murray M'Cheyne used to attend Bruce's church.

the soul are summoned forth to the enterprise, as they ought to be for most deliberate, most solemn, most patient and persevering investigation; and the inquirer is resolved, as he ought to be, to observe with faithfulness God's holy will as revealed, remembering who has said, "If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine".

But, even then, his entrance into the kingdom is brought about by the putting forth of a divine power and by the extension of a divine generosity to him, just as much as to the infant who has used no effort at all. It is right and dutiful, nay indispensable, in his case, that the effort shall be made and prosecuted and persevered in – it may be both very long and laboriously. But for that very reason it becomes all the more indispensable that the man should be told how it is not because he makes the effort, but merely whilst he is doing so, that God, in infinite power and mercy, is to grant him that translation into the kingdom of His Son, for which it is well that he is now contending. For, except he shall receive the kingdom of God or salvation as gratuitously as a little child or an infant receives it, he cannot enter therein.

Our Lord's affirmation in that passage is thus substantially an affirmation of the absolute sovereignty and freeness of the grace of the gospel. And the expression, "of such is the kingdom of heaven", is thus explained by these other evangelists to signify that the kingdom of the saints is composed of persons who are all indebted to the free grace of God, as much and as absolutely as the infant who is saved manifestly without works, and even without reflection.

*The young man's character.* Now it was just after our Lord had delivered this most memorable testimony that one came and said unto Him, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" We learn from the twenty-second verse of our passage that this young man had great riches. It appears from Luke's Gospel that he occupied a position of honour and authority, to which, notwithstanding his inexperience, he had probably been raised by his more than ordinary reputation for virtue and intelligence. And from Mark's Gospel we learn further that, without anything of the arrogance which we might almost have expected in a youth in these circumstances, he manifested just the ardour of youth in the manner of pressing his inquiry. He came running to Christ in the way, kneeled to Him and asked: "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

The following verses of the narrative attest his unexceptionable character, so far as common morality was concerned. His account of his past conduct, given to our Lord with evident candour, enables us to say that he lived after the "straitest sect of the Pharisees" and that, as touching the righteousness of the law, according to their interpretations of it, he was altogether blameless.

When he replied to our Lord, in reference to various commandments which, taken literally, forbid all violence, licentiousness, fraud, falsehood, disobedience to parents, and all manner of selfishness and hardness of heart, he said, "All these things have I kept from my youth up" – that is to say, even from my very childhood, for he was still in his youth. He leads us to suppose that he belonged to that very numerous class of persons whose minds are so constituted by nature that, having no very violent and headstrong passions implanted in them, they find self-control comparatively easy. Simply on the strength of a certain uprightness and amiability of disposition, they may be said to escape much of that pollution "which is in the world", and by which so many of the unthinking and the wilful are hurried on to perdition.

But though the restraint on his moral conduct probably owed much more to the evenness of his temper than to any force of religious principle, it appears that for some time before this interview with our Lord, he had begun to think about his condition, not as a sinner, but only as a creature who was to die and to live again for ever. He possessed many things which most people regard as "good things" – he had a fortune and many friends, and influence and authority, and a great and growing reputation. Because still in his youth, he had the pleasures of the world both in possession and in prospect, and as yet, we may suppose, he was almost a stranger to its cares. Although surrounded thus by temptations which tended to engross his attention, it appears that he had begun to think very seriously and desirously of another life altogether.

*His desire for "eternal life"*. He calls that other "eternal life", and it accords well with his character to suppose – or rather, I should say, it is evident from what we are shown here of his character – that the word *eternal* expressed fully and exactly everything about that life which he either valued or conceived. It is evident that he did not desire a holy life – a life devoted more entirely to God – or to approach God with greater intimacy and intelligence. He would have been quite contented with the life he already had if only it were prolonged, although without God, to eternity. The only change he wished was precisely as he expressed it, a change in point of duration. He had an awakened sense and solemnity of spirit which, however rarely to be found among those of his age and however surrounded by so many snares and enticements, was really nothing more than what one moment's reflection is sufficient to generate in any reasonable being.

His earnest inquiry after eternal life, so far from necessarily indicating, as we are apt to think, that his heart and conscience were turning from the world to God, can be most simply and satisfactorily explained upon the quite contrary supposition. The more intensely he loved the world, the more

anxious he would naturally become as he reflected on the fact that it was to pass away from him – but merely as a reasonable, reflecting being. He was in earnest to find out some kind of eternal, or never-ending, happiness which, as nearly as possible, was of the same kind as the present. Accordingly, if we just suppose that a great love of the world and a greater than ordinary share of thoughtfulness met in his mind, we need not suppose that, along with that, any spiritual desire was necessary to account for his anxious and reverent inquiry, “Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?”

The sequel of the narrative, as I shall presently show, proves beyond doubt that this – which is so obvious and so probable an explanation of the real state of his mind – is consistent with fact. We shall soon see how simply and conclusively our Lord shows us that this young man’s inquiry, with all its seeming religiousness, was not truly religious. It was such an inquiry as might have been made by a man who had no conviction of sin whatever. In point of fact, it originated in the mind of this youth much more from his love of the world than from any desire for a salvation which he did not value and did not understand.

*The worldly man’s seeking.* But before going further into that vein of discovery, let us briefly observe how much reason there is to fear that many of those cases of very anxious inquiry are to be accounted for in the very same way. A worldly man may suppose that when, in addition to all the integrity and propriety of what is ordinarily termed a well-spent life, he begins to entertain as a new feeling altogether, a somewhat solemn impression of his condition as a man whose life is but a vapour, and whom the seasons are moving onward to the end of all things on earth. I know nothing more natural, or more specious, than for such a man to imagine that this perfectly new feeling, with all its real solemnity and all its apparent sacredness, is like the resurrection within him of a new life and a new principle.

Suppose him to feel, like this youth, at such a period of life and in such prosperous circumstances that it is clearly not to be accounted for as mere discontent or a mere casual alarm. Suppose him to feel that it is a seriousness setting in and settling with him and, even in the early prime and brightest sunshine of his days, forcing him to look often upward and away from all his interests in time. Erring and incompetent as the earthly creature is in regard to everything that is spiritual, the wonder is not that the man mistakes so solemnising a change for such a weanedness from the world as lifts the soul from lying vanities to God. It is far more wonderful – it must be absolutely supernatural – if he shall avoid that too common an error.

The man has a new and solemnised feeling. He thinks solemnly of death

and eternity and a region of invisibles, which other men, his companions, seem to have forgotten almost utterly. Besides he is inquiring about his duty, and very earnest – though in his own way – to make some probable provision against the last, dread event, and to strengthen all his securities, with none of which is he wholly satisfied. In one word, he realises to a great extent the character of that apparently most religious inquirer in the passage before me. No wonder that he mistakes, as the young man did, the real state of his heart, imagining that he is now at least more religious – that he has undergone, at least substantially, that mighty transition which is so often described as the conversion of the soul, And no wonder he imagines that, by a steady persistence in the same course and a cultivation of the same serious habits, he is in a fair way of attaining his final salvation.

*What kind of seeking is it?* Yet it is evident to every impartial observer that all this, as I already said, will very often proceed from no greater change than simply this: the man is more thoughtful. He is only more reflective. He is only making a better use of his reason as a being endowed with faculties which can note, and be saddened by, the ravages of decay, and can look forward to a future of interminable ages. To fear death is natural. To love life is natural. Even to long after immortality is natural. But the question is: What kind of death, what kind of life, what kind of immortality? Is it spiritual death that you fear? Is it a life of holiness that you love? Is it an immortality of intimate communion with a God of infinite sacredness that you have now begun to inquire after, because you have discovered the emptiness of the world?

When these questions are pressed home upon oneself, one may indeed discover that there is no more delight in God than ever and no more desire after spiritual things. His heart may be in no way changed, his conscience in no way enlightened, and his worldliness (though it seems to have been dispelled) may be more ingrained than ever. The only difference is that, because he is now, as a reasonable man, so much more meditative, he finds it necessary to his peace to have some sort of prospect for when he will have to leave the world, and he is seeking anxiously to establish such a prospect. But it is not so that he may delight himself in God and in the things of His spiritual kingdom, but often quite the reverse – so that he may enjoy the world, and the things of the world, with less interruption from the ever-haunting foreboding of an undone eternity.

Thus it is that the worldliness of a man's heart may seem to have gone out of him, when in fact it has only gone in deeper. It may seem to have been driven out of us by the desires of the new nature, when in point of fact it is only disguised and put further out of sight by the subtle artifices of the old



nature. There may be even a vast deal more worldliness, without any appearance of it, if only there happens to be more serious reflection. Nothing is more possible than for any of us to be even more absolutely worldly and unspiritual than ever, even whilst we are inquiring earnestly with this seeming convert: “What good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?”

***Settling the question.*** It is surely very desirable, therefore, for each of us to take up some simple plan for settling the question, whether it is actually so with ourselves or not. And this is supplied by the passage before us.

Observe just how our Lord proceeded in order, simply and summarily, to undeceive this youth, who, like too many of ourselves, had so widely mistaken a habit of more serious reflection for a decisive change of heart and of principle. Although merely awakened as a reasonable being to desire, and to make busy search for, something permanent and eternal, this young man seems plainly to have supposed himself a new and a spiritual man, dead to the world and alive only to God. The Saviour proceeded to convince him that his heart was the very same as ever – that it was not really God and goodness that he loved, but that what he really sought was just a permanent possession and enjoyment of what this life had so profusely afforded him; He proposed just to subject him to the very simple but most decisive experiment of taking all these carnal things away. Jesus said to him, “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me”.

To understand at once and precisely our Lord’s meaning in submitting to him this seemingly hard demand, we need only consider what is the contrivance which men most readily fall upon. When observing an effect which may arise from one or other of two causes, we may wish to ascertain which of them is the true cause. Suppose, for example, a fluid is presented to you in which you detect a particular flavour, such as may be imparted to it by one or other of two different ingredients. If, when you separate out one of these ingredients, the peculiar flavour goes away with it, and the remaining solution becomes insipid, would you not be convinced that the ingredient removed was the cause of that peculiar taste you had detected?

Now this is exactly the experiment which our Lord had recourse to. Temporal and spiritual matters are blended so perfectly into one that at first sight it is impossible to tell, in such a case as the present, which of these two the man’s heart is attached to. Both are together, and he relishes the mixture. But I proceed to take away, or I require him to abstract, one of the ingredients. And when I find that he is loath to do so, and has no relish for the other separately, I see but too plainly the carnality which had up till then deceived him. Christ proposed to take away the temporal things, leaving him immeasurably

more of the spiritual things in their stead. And when you see that the man goes away sorrowful, simply because of that decisive proposal, you cannot fail to perceive that the man's heart all the while was not with God but with the world. What he was seeking was a perpetuity of alienation from his Maker, even when he inquired with such seeming religiousness, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?"

Now, it is evident that we may, as simply and successfully, try the same experiment upon ourselves. Without giving up our worldly goods, we can place the things of God and His kingdom separately before our attention, as truly as if we had really given them up. Without any effort of imagination, we are practically put under the obligation of doing so every Sabbath day. We are to make a fair trial whether or not we can be happy – and as much as ever in our element – without company, without worldly employments and recreations, with God, and with God alone. If so, we are really seeking salvation. And even when spiritual and temporal things are most mixed up together, as they truly are and ought to be in the average tenor of our life, we may be sure enough, if this is the case, that we are really seeking salvation. We may be sure that our relish is owing to the spiritual ingredient and not merely to the temporal one, that we have new desires and are new creatures, quickened from a death in trespasses and translated into the light and the liberty of the kingdom of our God.

**Concluding remarks.** Having thus endeavoured to explain and apply the leading principle of our passage, we shall now conclude with one or two remarks which seem still to be necessary for its more complete illustration.

1. When it is said in Mark's Gospel that "Jesus, beholding" this young man, "loved him", you are not to suppose that the Lord looked on him with peculiar complacency, that He considered him to be in a more gracious mind than most others in the world. The same word is employed when Christ is speaking of the feeling with which we should regard our enemies. His well-known command is that we "love our enemies", meaning evidently that we should regard them with kindness, apart altogether from any sentiment of esteem, and it is of importance to remark that the word has the same meaning here. It is used just to express the compassion of our Lord, as more earnestly awakened for this youth who was so deceived, without meaning to say that He at all approved or commended him.

2. There are certain passages of Scripture that seem at first sight to be at variance with that simple view of the gospel which represents salvation as depending upon our belief or reception of a particular proposition. And this is one of these passages. It seems to put salvation distinctly upon another footing. It seems, at first sight at least, to favour a preaching of the law, in

contradistinction from a preaching of the simple and solemn overture of the gospel. But it seems only to do so when we altogether mistake the drift of the whole passage, which was not to declare the one way of salvation, but to unmask a most insidious deception. Had our Lord meant to declare the one way of salvation, He would have said, as at other times, “I am the way”; “I am the resurrection and the life”; “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son”; etc. But instead of here declaring the one way of salvation, He wishes simply to show this youth that he is not, as he imagines, really seeking to know it. And He adds at the close, “Come and follow Me”, intimating that, when he really desired to know the way, he would not fail to receive further instruction.

3. Our last remark refers to that connection between this incident and the foregoing which I alluded to when I set out. Our Lord had just declared how free and absolute is the sovereignty of grace, and in the instance of this youth we find a living exemplification of the doctrine so declared. It is plain from his character how different true religion is from mere serious and solemn reflections on the vanity of life, and on the wasting and wearing out of every earthly possession. It is plain that it supposes a man to have a new and a spiritual nature, which God alone can bestow and which no services of ours can ever merit from Him. The change is so great that it must be altogether His own work, and so inestimably precious that it can never be ours but through the merit and intercession of Him who earned it. And the example of this worldly youth gives the clearest possible proof of the solemn truth of this testimony: except a man shall receive the kingdom of God as gratuitously as a little child, he can in no wise enter therein.

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## Jonathan Edwards<sup>1</sup>

### 7. Stockbridge and Princeton

From June 1750 Edwards was without a charge, though for some time he occupied the Northampton pulpit when no one else was available. John Erskine, the prominent Edinburgh minister, suggested that he might come over to Scotland. Though Edwards did not reject the possibility, nothing ever came of the matter; he had further work to do in America. In July 1751 Edwards was telling a correspondent in Edinburgh: “I with my family have for this two years past gone through many troubles. But I hope the Lord has not forsaken us, nor suffered us to sink under our trials. He has in many respects

<sup>1</sup>This is the final article in the series. Last month we looked at the communion controversy, which resulted in Edwards’ ministry in Northampton being brought to an abrupt end.

exercised a fatherly care of us in our distresses. A door seems to be opened for my further improvement in the work of the ministry in this place.”<sup>2</sup>

Edwards was writing from the Massachusetts frontier settlement of Stockbridge and the following month saw him installed there as a missionary to the Indians. On a Sabbath he would preach to the Europeans in the settlement, who numbered only about a dozen families in contrast to the hundreds of hearers in Northampton. Many years later, a Dr West, who as a boy used to listen to Edwards in Stockbridge, told Edwards’ descendant and biographer, S E Dwight, his impressions. Dwight wrote: “On one occasion, when the sermon exceeded two hours in its length, he told me that from the time that Mr Edwards had fairly unfolded his subject, the attention of the audience was fixed and motionless until its close, when they seemed disappointed that it should terminate so soon. There was such a bearing down of truth upon the mind, he observed, that there was no resisting it.”<sup>3</sup> And after addressing the Europeans, Edwards would, through an interpreter, preach to the Indians.

What follows is Edward’s outline of a sermon to the Indians, on 2 Timothy 3:16: “’Tis worth the while to take a great deal of pains to learn to read and understand the Scriptures. I would have all of you think of this. When there is such a book that you may have, how can you be contented without being able to read it? How does it make you feel when you think there is a Book that is God’s own Word? . . . Parents should take care that their children learn . . . This will be the way to be kept from the devil. . . Devil can’t bear [the Bible]. Kept from hell. To be happy for ever. But if you let the Word of God alone, and never use, and you can’t expect the benefits of it. . .

“You must not only hear and read, etc, but you must have it sunk down into your heart. Believe. Be affected. Love the Word of God. Written in your heart. Must not only read and hear, but *do* the things. Otherwise no good; but will be the worse for it. And you should endeavour to understand. To that end to learn the English tongue. If you had the Bible in your own language, I should not say so much. Consider how much it is worth the while to go often to your Bible to hear the great God Himself speak to you. There you may hear Christ speak. How much better must we think this is than the word of men. Better than the word of the wisest man of the world. How much wiser is God than man. Here all is true; nothing false. Here all is wise; nothing foolish.”<sup>4</sup>

Shortly after he settled in Stockbridge, Edwards, along with the Com-

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in Iain H Murray, *Jonathan Edwards, A New Biography*, p 341.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p 392.

<sup>4</sup>Quoted in Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p 386.

missioners for his mission, met some of the Mohawk chiefs. His notes for his speech of welcome to the chiefs have been preserved: “Your coming here will rejoice the hearts of all good men as they will hope it will be a means of your coming into greater light and knowledge in the Christian religion and so be a means of your eternal salvation and happiness. We don’t desire to keep you from the knowledge of the Bible, the Word of God, as the French priests do their Indians. We are willing that you could read the Word of God as well as we, and know as much as we. While I continue here I shall be willing to come from time to time and to do my utmost to instruct you in the true Christian religion.”<sup>5</sup> Many of the Indians in Stockbridge were already communicants, and some others professed faith during Edwards’ time among them.

Edwards’ time in Stockbridge also was marred by controversy; the tensions in his previous congregation followed him, as the leading family on this part of the frontier belonged to Northampton – they were in fact related to himself, as were a number of those who had been most vocal in their opposition in his previous congregation. Many of the difficulties in Stockbridge had to do with the running of the mission school. “I still meet with trouble,” he wrote to Scottish minister Thomas Gillespie, “and expect no other as long as I live in this world. Some men of influence have much opposed my continuing a missionary at Stockbridge and have taken occasion abundantly to reproach me and endeavour my removal. But I desire to bless God, He seems in some respects to set me out their reach. He raises me up friends who are exerting themselves to counteract the designs of my opposers. . . . My people, both English and Indians, steadfastly adhere to me, excepting the family with whom the opposition began and those related to them.”<sup>6</sup>

Complaints against Edwards’ conduct were sent to Boston and commissioners came to Stockbridge to investigate. They concluded that they were “well satisfied as to the general conduct of Mr Edwards”. And they went on: “He has acquired the general affections of the Indians, and influence over them, which he constantly employs for the best purposes, and the success thereof will doubtless be more evident were it not for the unwearied opposition of some people from personal prejudices”.<sup>7</sup>

Edwards’ belief in missionary work among the Indians is confirmed by his action in 1755 in sending his nine-year-old son, also called Jonathan, with another missionary Gideon Hawley, who was setting out to begin work among Indian tribes at Onohoquaha, about 200 miles west of Stockbridge. The idea

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p 369.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p 381.

<sup>7</sup>Quoted in George M Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards, A Life*, p 403.

was that Jonathan junior would learn the Mohawk language in the hope that, when he grew up, he might himself become a missionary among them.

Some time later his father wrote: “I am full of concern for you, often think of you, and often pray for you. Though you are at so great a distance from us and from all your relations, yet this is a comfort to us that the same God that is here is also at Onohoquaha and that though you are out of our sight and out of our reach, you are always in God’s hands, who is infinitely gracious; and we can go to Him and commit you to His care and mercy. Take heed that you don’t forget or neglect Him. Always set God before your eyes and live in His fear and seek Him every day with all diligence; for He, and He only, can make you happy or miserable as He pleases; and your life and health and the eternal salvation of your soul, and your all in this life and that which is to come, depends on His will and pleasure.

“The week before last, on Thursday, David died, whom you knew and used to play with and who used to live at our house. His soul is gone into the eternal world. Whether he was prepared for death, we don’t know. This is a loud call of God to you to prepare for death. You see that they that are young die, as well as those that are old; David was not very much older than you. Remember what Christ said, that you must be born again or you can never see the kingdom of God. Never give yourself any rest unless you have good evidence that you are converted and become a new creature. . . .”<sup>8</sup>

Life in Stockbridge had its difficulties but, as the congregation was so much smaller, Edwards had much more time for his studies, and for writing. Previously most of his books had developed from sermons he had preached, but most of his Stockbridge output was different.

He had long been concerned about an incipient Arminianism in New England, and in his latter years in Northampton he was hard at work studying the subject. And the extent to which he had already pondered the subject and filled his notebooks with his thoughts meant that he was now able to produce several volumes in a relatively short period of time. First there was, to give it its full title, his *Careful and Strict Inquiry Into the Modern Prevailing Notions of That Freedom of Will Which is Supposed to Be Essential to Moral Agency*. In a letter to a Scottish friend – referring to the Arminian view that sinners have the power to direct their wills to good or to evil as they please – he expressed the concerns which lay behind this collection of writings: “The longer I live and the more I have to do with the souls of men in the work of the ministry, the more I see of this. Notions of this sort are one of the main hindrances of the success of the gospel and other means of grace, in the conversion of sinners. . . .

<sup>8</sup>Quoted in Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p 394-5.

“With respect to self-flattery and presumption, nothing can possibly be conceived more directly tending to it than a notion of liberty, at all times possessed, consisting in a power to determine one’s own will to good or evil, which implies a power men have, at all times, to determine them to repent and turn to God. And what can more effectually encourage the sinner in present delays and neglects and embolden him to go on in sin, in a presumption of having his own salvation at all times at his command?”<sup>9</sup> This was followed by works on *The End for Which God Created the World* and *The Nature of True Virtue*. And in May 1757 Edwards completed his last work: *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended*.

Stockbridge was always open to attack from hostile Indian tribes, but in 1754 war broke out between France and Britain, of which America was still a colony. The local Indians stayed loyal but for various reasons many of them moved away. The war did not go well and there were sporadic small attacks on Stockbridge which resulted in occasional death.

Meantime Edwards was hearing encouraging news from the College of New Jersey, which was later to grow into Princeton University. In February 1757, its president Aaron Burr – who had married Edwards’ daughter Esther – wrote his father-in-law about an awakening among the students in the College. He concluded with the words: “I never saw anything in the late revival [of 1740-42] that more evidently discovered the hand of God”.

In just over 18 months, Burr was dead, and the Board of the College decided that Edwards was the man to replace him. But Edwards saw a number of difficulties. For one thing, the move would interfere with his studies, particularly his aim of writing a *History of the Work of Redemption*, a much bigger work than eventually appeared under that title. It was to be “a body of divinity in an entire new method, being thrown into the form of a history; considering the affair of Christian theology . . . in reference to the great work of redemption by Jesus Christ”. He also questioned his ability to teach the wide range of subjects he was afraid would be required of him. Eventually, after consulting a council of ministers, he consented to become president of the college at Princeton.

On Edwards’ last Sabbath in Stockbridge, he preached from the words: “For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come”. He moved to Princeton in January 1758 alone, expecting the rest of his family to follow when the weather would improve. He began his duties cheerfully, accepting that it was the will of God that he should take up his new post. Smallpox was prevalent in the area at the time and Edwards deemed it wise to be inoculated. However, the inoculation was not a success; Edwards, it would seem, took

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p 426-7.

full-blown smallpox and died four weeks later. “Never”, wrote his doctor, “did any mortal man more fully and clearly evidence the sincerity of all his professions, by one continued, universal, calm, cheerful resignation and patient submission to the divine will, through each stage of his disease”.

This was altogether consistent with what he had written in his will five years previously: “First of all, I give and commend my soul into the hands of God that gave it, and to the Lord Jesus Christ its glorious, all-sufficient, faithful and chosen Redeemer, relying alone on the free and infinite mercy and grace of God through His worthiness and mediation, for its eternal salvation; and my body I commend to the earth, to be committed to the dust in decent Christian burial . . . hoping, through the grace, faithfulness and almighty power of my everlasting Redeemer, to receive the same again, at the last day, made like unto His glorious body”.<sup>10</sup> He had no continuing city in this world but, by the grace of God, he had made preparation for his departure to the “city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God”.

An author of the early twentieth century owned a chair made from wood which had been originally part of Edwards’ now-demolished home in Stockbridge and declared: “As oft as I sit in it, I congratulate the world that it has escaped the tyranny of Edwards’ theology”. His confidence, thankfully, was more than premature. It is probably true that more of Edwards’ writings have been circulated during the past 50 years than ever before.

And the truths which Edwards sought to spread around the world will yet triumph. He himself pointed to the time when “the Spirit of God shall be gloriously poured out for the wonderful revival and propagation of religion. . . . This pouring out, when it is begun, shall soon bring great multitudes to forsake that vice and wickedness which now so generally prevails, and shall cause that vital religion, which is now so despised and laughed at in the world, to revive”.<sup>11</sup>

Jonathan Edwards’ name will always be associated with revival – both because of the outpourings of the Holy Spirit which so remarkably accompanied his preaching and because of his own writings on the subject. But as we long for further outpourings of God’s Spirit, this is *the* revival which the Scriptures specially point to us to, and for which the people of God are to pray, when “the visible kingdom of Satan shall be overthrown and the kingdom of Christ set up on the ruins of it, everywhere throughout the whole habitable globe”.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Quoted in Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p 422.

<sup>11</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *The History of Redemption*, 1959 Sovereign Grace Book Club edition, p 305.

<sup>12</sup>Edwards, *The History of Redemption*, p 315.



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## A Call for Secret Prayer<sup>1</sup>

*Thomas Brooks*

The times wherein we live call aloud for secret prayer. Hell seems to have broken loose and men turned into incarnate devils. Land-destroying and soul-damning wickednesses walk up and down the streets with a whore's forehead, without the least check or control, "Thou hast a whore's forehead, thou refusest to be ashamed" (Jer 3:3); "Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush" (Jer 6:15). They had sinned away shame, instead of being ashamed of sin. Custom in sin had quite banished all sense of sin and all shame for sin, so that they would not suffer nature to draw her veil of blushing before their great abominations. They were like to Caligula, a wicked emperor, who used to say of himself that he loved nothing better in himself than that he could not be ashamed. The same words are repeated in Jeremiah 8:12. How applicable these scriptures are to the present time I will leave the prudent reader to judge.

But what does the prophet do now that they were as bold in sin and as shameless as so many harlots? That you may see in Jeremiah 13:17: "But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places [or *secresies*] for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore [Hebrew, *weeping weep*, or *shedding tears*, *shed tears*; the doubling of the verb notes the bitter and grievous lamentation that he should make for them], and run down with tears". Now they were grown up to such a height of sin and wickedness that they were above all shame and blushing; now they were grown so proud, so hardened, so obstinate, so rebellious, so mad upon mischief, that no mercies could melt them or allure them, nor any threatenings or judgements any ways terrify them or stop them. The prophet goes into a corner; he retires himself into the most secret places and there he weeps bitterly; there he weeps as if he were resolved to drown himself in his own tears. When the springs of sorrow rise high, a Christian turns his back upon company and retires himself into places of greatest privacy, that so he may the more freely and the more fully vent his sorrow and grief before the Lord.

Ah, England, England, what pride, luxury, lasciviousness, licentiousness, wantonness, drunkenness, cruelties, injustice, oppressions, fornications, adulteries, falsehoods, hypocrisy, bribery, atheism, horrid blasphemies, and hellish

<sup>1</sup>Taken from Brooks' *Works*, vol 2, pp 193-4, and slightly edited – an extract from his *The Privy Key to Heaven*; the original title of the book reviewed in the December issue. Here we have the sixteenth of his arguments for engaging in private prayer. How appropriate his words are for today will no doubt be clear to "the prudent reader"!

impieties are now to be found rampant in the midst of thee! Ah, England, England, how are the Lord's Sabbaths profaned, pure ordinances despised, Scriptures rejected, the Spirit resisted and derided, the righteous reviled, wickedness countenanced, and Christ many thousand times in a day by these cursed practices afresh crucified! Ah, England, England, were our forefathers alive, how sadly would they blush to see such a horrid degenerate posterity as is to be found in the midst of thee! How is our forefathers' hospitality converted into riot and luxury, their frugality into pride and prodigality, their simplicity into subtlety, their sincerity into hypocrisy, their charity into cruelty, their chastity into chambering and wantonness, their sobriety into drunkenness, their plain dealing into dissembling, their works of compassion into works of oppression, and their love to the people of God into an utter enmity against the people of God, etc!

And what is the voice of all these crying abominations, but every Christian to his closet, and there weep, with weeping Jeremiah, bitterly, for all these great abominations whereby God is dishonoured openly? O weep in secret for their sins who openly glory in their sins, which should be their greatest shame. O blush in secret for them that are past all blushing for their sins, for who knows but that the whole land may fare the better for the sakes of a few that are mourners in secret? But however it goes with the nation, such as mourn in secret for the abominations of the times may be confident that, when sweeping judgements shall come upon the land, the Lord will hide them in the secret chambers of His providence, He will set a secret mark of deliverance upon their foreheads that mourn in secret for the crying sins of the present day, as He did in Ezekiel 9:4-6.

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## The Doctrine of Forgiveness (4)<sup>1</sup>

*Rev Neil M Ross*

**F**orgiving One Another. God's children should be prepared to forgive others; they have the hope that their sins are now covered and will not confront them to their condemnation at last. This is a duty laid upon them by their Father in heaven. Let us first note the main passages of Scripture which present us with the obligation to forgive one another when we offend one another.

In Matthew 6 we read the prayer the Saviour taught His disciples – what we call the Lord's Prayer. One of its petitions is: "Forgive us our debts, as

<sup>1</sup>Parts 1 and 2 dealt with God's judicial forgiveness, while part 3, in last December's issue, dealt with God's fatherly forgiveness.

we forgive our debtors” (v 6). Having concluded the prayer, He returned immediately to the petition about forgiveness, saying, “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (vv 14,15).

On a later occasion, the Saviour told His disciples, “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother” (Matt 18:15). Peter then asked, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?” The Saviour replied, “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven” (Matt 18:21,22). He also proceeded to tell the parable of the unmerciful man who, although forgiven his debt by his lord, refused to forgive the debt owed to him by a fellow servant. Consequently, that unforgiving servant was imprisoned (Matt 18:23-34). The Saviour closes with the solemn warning: “So likewise shall My heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses” (Matt 18:35).

The Apostle Paul gave similar instruction to the church at Ephesus, “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph 4:32); and also to the saints at Colosse, “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Col 3:13).

It is to be noted that these passages refer to *personal* offences, which may be defined as anything by which we are personally wronged or injured in our person, reputation, family, property or feelings, and which Scripture describes as someone transgressing, trespassing or sinning against another. Of course, if the wrong done to one personally is also of a *public* nature and injures the cause of Christ as well as oneself publicly, then the Church, through its officers, must seek to remedy the situation and bring the offender to repentance. If the offender is disciplined, then in due time, provided the offender is penitent, the Church is to intimate forgiveness to him in the sense of lifting the discipline which has been imposed on him and instating him again into the fellowship of the Church. It was in this sense that the church in Corinth was to forgive the erring brother; Paul wrote: “So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow” (2 Cor 2:7). And such a person should be restored in the “spirit of meekness” (Gal 6:1).

If the wrong done to one personally is of a private nature, the procedure to be followed is given in the well-known passage: “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone:

if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican” (Matt 18:15-17).

It might be argued that this procedure also applies to wrongs of a more public nature, but Matthew Poole’s view of the passage is this: “The rule therefore seemeth to be given concerning private miscarriages – not such only as are done in the sight or hearing of a single person, but such as are not the matter of public fame, nor openly committed before a multitude, but being committed more secretly, are come only to the knowledge of some particular person or persons. In such cases it is the will of God, not that we should blazon and publish them, but, being certain that any Christian hath so offended, it is our duty first to go to him, and tell him of it – that is, not only tell him what thou knowest, or hast heard in matter of fact that he hath spoken or done, but show him also the sinfulness of it.”<sup>2</sup>

John Calvin’s comments (which I give at length) on these verses in Matthew 18 are also very helpful: “Now He [the Saviour] distinctly lays down three steps of brotherly correction. The first is to give a private advice to the person who has offended. The second is, if he shall give any sign of obstinacy, to advise him again in presence of witnesses. The third is, if no advantage shall be obtained in that way, to deliver him up to the public decision of the Church. The design of this, as I have said, is to hinder charity from being violated under the pretence of fervent zeal. As the greater part of men are driven by ambition to publish with excessive eagerness the faults of their brethren, Christ seasonably meets this fault by enjoining us to cover the faults of brethren, as far as lies in our power; for those who take pleasure in the disgrace and infamy of brethren are unquestionably carried away by hatred and malice, since, if they were under the influence of charity, they would endeavour to prevent the shame of their brethren.”

Calvin continues: “But it is asked, Ought this rule to be extended indiscriminately to every kind of offence? For there are very many who do not allow any public censures, till the offender has been privately admonished. But there is an obvious limitation in the words of Christ, for He does not simply, and without exception, order us to advise or reprove privately, and in the absence of witnesses, all who have offended, but bids us attempt this method when we have been offended in private; by which is meant, not that it is a business of our own, but that we ought to be wounded and grieved whenever God is offended. And Christ does not now speak about bearing

<sup>2</sup>*Commentary on the Holy Bible*, Edinburgh, 1974 reprint, vol 3, p 85.

injuries, but teaches us in general to cultivate such meekness towards each other, as not to ruin by harsh treatment those whom we ought to save.”

He then comments on the expression *against thee* in verse 15: “This expression, as is evident from what we have said, does not denote an injury committed against anyone, but distinguishes between secret and open sins. For if any man shall offend against the whole Church, Paul enjoins that he be publicly reproved, so that even elders shall not be spared; for it is in reference to them that he expressly enjoins Timothy to rebuke them publicly in the presence of all, and thus to make them a general example to others (1 Tim 5:20). And certainly it would be absurd that he who has committed a public offence, so that the disgrace of it is generally known, should be admonished by individuals; for if a thousand persons are aware of it, he ought to receive a thousand admonitions. The distinction, therefore, which Christ expressly lays down, ought to be kept in mind, that no man may bring disgrace upon his brother, by rashly, and without necessity, divulging secret offences.”<sup>3</sup>

How exactly is the believer to show Christian forgiveness to those who have wronged him? It is not a duty he finds easy to address. Forgive he must – nothing less is required by God – but how is he to do so? This is the question we will try to answer, DV, in the next instalment.

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## The Blessing and the Curse<sup>1</sup>

*Henry Law*

Leviticus 26:3-14. *If ye walk in My statutes, and keep My commandments, and do them . . . . But if ye will not hearken unto Me, and will not do all these commandments . . . .*

Throughout Leviticus the voice of mercy sounds. For what is mercy but a remedy for woe? At Sinai’s base, grace sweetly smiles. For what is grace but safety for the lost? Before this mount, the gospel clearly speaks. For what is the gospel but God’s scheme to save, while justice remains just and truth continues true and holiness appears more pure and honour bends not from its highest throne? These truths here gleam in a long train of types. He who would probe redemption’s depths will often seek this hallowed ground. He who would drink true wisdom’s cup will often search this book with prayer.

But before the tribes advance, God labours to impress. Truly, when sinners rush to hell, they strive against a warning God; they stop the ear; they set the

<sup>3</sup>*Commentary on the Harmony of the Gospels*, vol 2, pp 260-2, Ages Digital Library.

<sup>1</sup>Taken, with slight editing, from Law’s *The Gospel in Leviticus*.

face like flint; they harden the proud neck. They choose perdition and so perish. Reader, these final pages thus instruct. Heed the awakening purpose. There is a sacredness in parting words. Last admonitions usually sink deep. May the Lord's pen now touch each heart!

Here God adjoins paternal counsels to a sovereign's command. He shows what blessings crown obedient paths, what miseries beset the rebel-way. Emphatic images come in to win and to deter. Two passages, as signposts, are reared up. The one invites to the abode of peace. The other cries, Flee, for all wretchedness is here.

Alluring promises first court the listening tribes. Read Leviticus 26:3-13. Clusters of temporal good hang thick. Survey the dazzling catalogue; unfold the roll. It is a picture in which plenteousness abounds. The earth in season yields luxuriant stores. Scarceness and want are buried in deep graves. Peace waves her gentle sceptre. Invading hosts scare not the quiet vales. No ravaging beasts watch for their prey. And if assailing armies make attack, they move to sure defeat. A little band puts multitudes to flight. A happy progeny rejoices in each house. These are external gifts, but spiritual delights are scattered with copious hand. God's presence is assured. His near abode is with His sons. He claims them as His own. He gives Himself to them. "I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be My people" (Lev 26:12). Such are the blessings pledged if statutes are observed. Can any read this list and hesitate? Can any hear and choose rebellion's lot?

Tremendous threats forbid. Read Leviticus 26:14-39. The scene now changes. Peal follows peal of terrifying awe. The disobedient must wring out appalling dregs. Health shall hang down its withered head. Each pining malady, each sore disease, each racking pain, shall prey upon the tortured frame. Famine shall raise its ghastly form. Penury shall sit at every hearth. Seed shall be sown, but no crops spring. The trees shall mock with fruitless boughs. The forest shall send forth its ravenous hordes. The children and the cattle shall be mangled in the roads, and thus the homes shall be a solitary waste. The sound of constant war shall roar. The hostile banner shall deride the fallen city. The holy sanctuary shall be no refuge. If offerings be brought, God will refuse. Such is the heritage if the covenant be not kept. Can any read this and not tremble?

God's word is fixed as heaven's high throne. He speaks. Performance is at hand. The sons of Israel madly scorned His sway. They rashly followed their own hearts' desire. And the foreshadowed doom arrived. Witness the desolation of their beautiful land, and their tribes scattered through the world's wide breadth. The sterile plains at home, the outcast wanderers abroad, bear witness that the threatened vengeance fell.

But there are nearer lessons from these blessings and this curse. The voice is spiritual. It pictures the fair land of grace. It shows the mercies which gird, as a girdle, the true family of faith. It opens too the blighted waste in which proud unsubmission dwells. The gospel prized is all this joy. The gospel scorned is all this woe.

Reader, words are an empty shadow when gospel blessedness is the theme. He who would know must taste, and then the half cannot be told. In Christ God gives Himself. Who can scan God? But till our God is scanned, the treasure is not fully weighed. But come and catch some glimpse. Believe in Christ, and you are welcomed as God's child – God's heir. Your seat is at His table. Hear His assuring voice: "All things are yours . . . all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor 3:21-23). At every moment you may draw near. You may tell out your every sorrow and your every need. The ears of love receive. The hand of power relieves. Supplies of grace are largely given. The heavens come down in showers of goodness. The gift of Jesus leaves no gift withheld. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

Faith finds abundance in the land of grace. For every sin there is a fountain close. For all unrighteousness there is a glorious robe. "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." For every burden a succour is at hand. "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." Light, guidance, peace sparkle throughout the gospel page. When Satan terrifies, the cross is seen. When conscience trembles, the dying Jesus shows His hands and side. When the law thunders, Calvary spreads its sheltering wings. When heart corruptions vex, the Spirit comes with renovating grace. Surely that life is blessed in which the citizenship is above, and all the hours rejoice at heaven's gate. The past is one wide flood of mercy; the present is a stream of joy; the future is all glory's ocean.

But when the end is come and the freed spirit wings its upward flight, who can conceive the rapture? Then Jesus is revealed. No distance intervenes. No separation can again occur. If faith finds Him so dear, what will be the realising sight!

And when the grave restores its prey, when this poor body puts on immortality's attire and shines more brightly than a thousand suns – like Christ, like Christ for ever. What then? God is fully known and fully loved and fully praised – while endless ages build the glory higher. Eternal love plans all this blessedness; the blood of Jesus purchases; His promise seals; His Spirit makes fit; His power will soon confer the crown.

It is sweet joy to linger on this scene. But God in faithfulness presents a contrast. Crowds upon crowds reject the gospel call. The Saviour's charms

charm not. His messages are scattered to the wind. Unhappy dupes of unbelieving pride, there is no misery like yours. God's curse embitters your whole cup. The past is dark; the present gives no light; the future is an endless night. Each day, each hour, is sin. But your feet seek no cleansing fount. Therefore your sins remain. Your inner man is filth's vile mass: no Saviour spreads His merits as your cloak. Troubles abound; there is no refuge to protect. Satan compels you to his miserable work; no mighty succourer breaks the chain. The world enslaves and cheats; no better portion calls you from its snares. If you look upwards, the heavens are barred; God frowns; each attribute condemns.

Friends bring no peace. Foes wound and no balm heals. Prosperity is no bright day. Adversity is a dark gloom. Wealth cannot help. Poverty is a hard load. Thus life is misery. Death plunges into deeper woe. Eternity is hell. Such is a brief outline of the accursed doom. God's grace is scorned. His precious Son is crucified afresh. Mercy can show no mercy. Pardon cannot release. God is an adversary. All that God is must strive to heat the furnace of His wrath. Ah, unbelief! Your heritage is one unmitigable curse. Rebel souls, how will you grapple with almightiness of wrath?

Do any such peruse these humble lines? Ah, you see your case! Will you remain on this accursed ground? Will you still live as a blighted tree – fit only for the burning? Will you thus hug the chain which drags you to perdition? O stay. You live, and Jesus lives. Who then can say that you may not be saved? I fain would reason with you; turn not away. The Spirit's power may reach your heart.

Perhaps you abound in earthly wealth? You never knew a scanty table? But say, can gold procure God's smile or hide your sins or blunt the sting of death or give a plea before the judgement seat. You know its utter emptiness. Then cast your cheating idol to the winds. Seek Christ. He is a treasure which can never fail. He can grant pardons. He can give title to the endless life. Be rich in Him and then your riches reach to heaven. Escape the curse. Receive the blessing.

But perhaps the humble cottage is your home, and daily toil scarce earns the daily fare. The poor man without God is poor indeed. It is not penury, but grace, which saves. But Jesus never scorns the lowly hut. Many a Lazarus rests on Abraham's breast. Admit Him to your heart. His presence brings content, which gilded palaces can never buy. His favour sets above the monarchs of this earth.

Is learning yours? The cultivated mind may roam through every field of knowledge and ransack all the stores of thought. But no philosophy gains heaven's key. This can be found in Christ alone. He who knows all which



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mind can grasp, and knows not Christ, is but a splendid driveller. A Christless life goes down to a fool's grave.

Perhaps days are on the wane, and you look back on a long track of years. Bless God that forbearing pity yet spares the worn-out thread. But the review is sad. What opportunities of seeking Christ have perished profitless! But is "too late" your doom? Is the door barred? Arise and knock. It has oft opened to an aged hand. May it be so to you! O what a change, if like the aged Simeon you depart in peace, clasping the Saviour in rejoicing arms!

It may be that youth is in its bud. Who can regard you without anxious thought? The world is watching to ensnare. Satan prepares his most beguiling baits. But grace can win you to the cross. Would you be wise? True wisdom is in Christ. Would you be great? He raises to a Godlike path. Would you be happy? He fills the cup with never-failing joys. Would you win others to a blessed life? He who lives Christ strews blessings all around. But linger not. Youth must soon fly. It often sinks into an early grave.

Are children yours? How much may turn upon the early bias which you give. Tell them of Christ. They who have intellect to grasp one thought may learn the truth of a redeeming cross and of pure joys beyond the grave. When hearts can feel, they may love Christ. Remember, apart from Christ, all here – and ever – is a dark curse. Christ, and Christ only, is eternal life. Blessed are they, and only they, who know and love and serve Him.

Ministers of Christ, behold your theme. So awfully denounce the curse that you and yours may flee it. So sweetly paint the blessing that you and yours may grasp it. So fully preach the Saviour that you and yours may be for ever saved. Blessed are they who – living, preaching, dying – make Christ their all.

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## Book Review

***Authentic Christianity***, vol 5, *Sermons on The Acts of the Apostles 7:30-60*, by D Martyn Lloyd-Jones, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 304 pages, £15.75, obtainable from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

This is the second-last volume in the series and, like those reviewed in previous issues of this Magazine, addresses men and women of the late 1960s in their sin and worldliness. Though nearly 40 years have passed since then, these sermons are not out of date, for the human condition remains fundamentally unchanged.

Speaking of Moses' meeting with God at the burning bush, Lloyd-Jones emphasises the greatness of God. "Can you measure God?" he asks, and

goes on to assert pointedly: "If I could measure and understand God, He would not be God; He would be smaller than my mind".

And what is the problem with man? It "is not just a question of lack of knowledge or the need of a little more teaching and exhortation or an appeal to people to love one another. . . . No . . . . The great message of the Bible is that the world is as it is because man has disobeyed God, and has fallen. It is a total Fall; he has fallen in all his faculties, in every part of his being."

And the preacher sounds a much-needed warning when he states: "It is very difficult to tell who is a Christian today because the Church and the world are so similar, and that is because the world has come into the Church".

The gospel is not forgotten, but it is fair to say that these sermons focus more on analysing fallen man than on presenting the way of salvation.

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## Obituary

### Mrs Margaret Nicolson

Margaret was born in the crofting village of Collam in North Harris on 11 October 1918, the fifth of eight children born to Angus and Mary Ann MacKay. Like many in her time, she spent most of her early working life in domestic service, in the Highlands. She was based at Fort William during the war and attended the church there as often as possible. There she met John Nicolson, who was to become her husband. They were married in Inverness on 23 October 1946, by Rev William Grant, and were spared to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary. Both husband and wife were committed to the testimony of the Church from an early age and in later years were to make a public profession of what the Lord had done for their souls.

John was a gamekeeper and worked on various estates in the Highlands. Margaret was his helpmeet in every sense of the term. They were both reserved about spiritual matters, yet were both principled in their dealings with others. Both were highly regarded by their employers; John in particular was highly respected for his refusal to work on the Sabbath.

Margaret lost the one child who was born alive when he was only two days old. Yet she gave every indication of being reconciled to God's will in these matters. She was one who by experience knew that "the Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works" (Ps 145:7).

John and Margaret retired to Leverburgh, before moving to Tarbert, and in both South and North Harris he was a respected elder. It was clear to any of the Lord's people who spent time in their home that God Himself was the Head of their home. Although little is known of Margaret's spiritual exper-

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ience, it was clear that she held all the Word of God to be very precious. She was received as a member in full communion in South Harris in August 1981. It is believed that her own minister's preaching was blessed to her.

Her life was a true example of practical Christianity and a reflection of the deeply experimental nature of her religion. Her last years were spent in the Church's Home in Leverburgh, where she was a godly example to others. Her passing is to be regretted by us all, especially those who did not fully appreciate her wise counsel when we had the opportunity to do so.

She spoke several times in her last years of her great concern about unchristian practices such as the celebration of Christmas among professing people in her native island. When we think of how grieved she would have been about the recent desecration of the Lord's Day in Harris, we are reminded of Isaiah 57:1: "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come".

Our sympathy at this time is with her relatives and friends, and the Lord's cause in Harris is now poorer without her many prayers. *(Rev) J B Jardine*

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## Protestant View

### Archbishop Williams Meets the Pope

Some readers will remember media images which caused dismay to godly Protestants 40 years ago: those of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, meeting and embracing the then pope in Rome. The consequent setting up of a Joint Commission of Roman Catholics and Anglicans was, as the then editor of this Magazine wrote, "the most determined and deplorable step taken in our time really to undermine and overthrow what remains of Reformation principles and practices in the Church of England, and indeed throughout Britain".

That historic meeting and its significance were recalled in Rome last November when the present Archbishop of Canterbury met the Pope. The importance the Roman Catholic Church in England attached to the Archbishop's visit was shown by his being accompanied by Cardinal Murphy O'Connor, who was also present at key meetings.

The joint statement issued after the meeting renewed a commitment to "full visible communion" – on Rome's terms, of course. Some might mistakenly think that her principles are closer to the Bible than those of the Church of England, which has increasingly veered from Scripture in the past 40 years, in particular by ordaining women and homosexuals to its priesthood

and “blessing” homosexual “unions” – with consequent divisions in its ranks.

Although the Church of Rome itself is notorious for its gross scandals and grave errors, it requires the Church of England to bend in its direction. Lord Monckton, former editor of a Roman Catholic newspaper, said recently, “If the Anglicans do not believe as we do in the Real Presence or in the sacramentality of holy orders . . . we still have no useful starting point from which to build towards that unity”.

However, the Vatican continues resolutely to reel in a prize catch – our nominally-Protestant nation, which it still regards as “Mary’s dowry”. As Dr Williams’ visit ended, he and a Vatican spokesman announced that a third phase of the Anglican and Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) will begin in 2007 and that a new document on shared mission will be published next year.

As the Church of England rejects Scripture, and instead heeds the ideas of “blind leaders of the blind” like Archbishop Williams, we need not wonder that it is becoming easy prey to Rome’s persistent programme of ecumenism. May the Lord arise and have mercy upon His Zion in our land and hasten the set time of her favour (Ps 102:13). NMR

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## Notes and Comments

### Sabbath Petition Update

It was reported in *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, November 2005, that the Synod of that year had endorsed a proposal of the Sabbath Observance Committee to address a petition to the Scottish Parliament requesting it to “legislate in favour of a weekly day of rest from work throughout Scotland, with business and commerce closing on that day, and that the day appointed be the Christian Sabbath”. This petition was submitted to the Parliament’s Public Petitions Committee. Officials pointed out that legislation affecting employment rights and duties was reserved to the UK Parliament and, in the light of their advice, the Synod in May 2006 agreed that the crave of the petition be rephrased to ask the Scottish Parliament to “debate the need for a weekly day of rest from work throughout Scotland and to encourage business and commerce to close on that day, and that the day appointed be the Christian Sabbath”. It was hoped that the Scottish Parliament might be minded to recommend that the UK Parliament legislate for Scotland to that effect, as it has done with other reserved matters.

In response to an invitation from the Editor we can now report that two members of the Sabbath Observance Committee submitted this petition to the

Public Petitions Committee on 15 November 2006. They emphasised, as the petition does, that the Church's primary motivation in submitting the petition was religious – the belief that the Sabbath Day is divinely ordained. They also emphasised that its observance by a constitutionally-Christian nation is a recognition of the claims of God which would honour God and enjoy His blessing. Recognition of the Sabbath as the particular day of rest to be observed followed logically from it being the day appointed in the Bible, the Book which is fundamental to the Christian identity of our nation.

The aim was also philanthropic in the widest sense – the benefit of body, mind and human relationships, as well as soul. The widespread existence of stress and the breakdown of order, respect, morality and happiness were not to be wondered at when this particular pillar of society, created by God, was so widely disregarded and disused. The recognition of the Sabbath as a day free from all but works of necessity and mercy would benefit the country morally, socially and economically as well as spiritually. That obedience to the law of God is beneficial follows logically from the fact that “the commandment [is] holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12).

Those presenting the petition were given a courteous hearing by the Committee. There may have been some sympathy with the idea that a day when all are free from unnecessary work would contribute to the well-being of individuals, families and society, though no indication was given of acquiescence in the religious basis or character of this day. The media reports of which we are aware were on the whole fair and positive as far as they went. Opportunity to discuss the matter further was given on Belfast radio and in the local Edinburgh press. The official communication from the Committee states that they agreed to seek views on the petition from the Department of Trade and Industry and the Scottish Executive and to obtain our comments on these responses before the petition is brought back before the Committee.

What the outcome of this petition may be we cannot tell at the time of writing. Raising the subject in a public forum may have the beneficial effect of making some here and there reconsider their attitude to the Lord's Day. We should pray that the Lord might be pleased to use feeble efforts to stimulate those in authority to consider their responsibility in these matters and to do what they can to bring our nation, in its public life, back to something which approximates to what God requires and to what once prevailed when no specific legislation was required.

How we need the spirit of Nehemiah, cupbearer to the heathen king in Shushan! Having wept and fasted and prayed for days before the God of heaven on account of the desolations of Jerusalem, he resolved to petition the king on behalf of the children of Israel. Sore afraid when the king enquired

as to the reason for his obvious sadness, he explained its cause. He records his response when the king asked him what he requested: "So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchre, that I may build it" (Neh 2:4,5). Nothing is impossible with the God of heaven, and no doubt his experience of the Lord's answer to his prayer strengthened Nehemiah to continue praying and working when he was later engaged in building the wall of Jerusalem and heard the enemies of God say "What do these feeble Jews?" (Neh 4:2).

Many see the temporal value of a day when people can turn aside from the routine of other days. Even the cessation of external activities which are public intrusions upon the sanctity of this day would contribute somewhat towards the civil government's responsibility to secure conditions in which "we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim 2:2). The Sabbath Day is really a defence around the ordinances of God's house and around the Christianity of the nation. We do long, however, to see many come to recognise the divine authority and spiritual function of God's holy day and to value it for all the right reasons. "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (Is 58:13,14). *HMC*

### **The Next Church of Scotland Moderator**

The Church of Scotland has decided it is time to have a female minister as Moderator of its General Assembly (the previous woman Moderator was an elder). Rev Sheilagh Kesting, secretary of her Church's Committee on Ecumenical Relations, has been nominated to take the chair at the 2007 Assembly.

We have now become used to Churches acting in defiance of the Scripture principle, as enunciated by Paul: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (1 Tim 2:11,12). Yet when the decision was first made to ordain women as ministers in the Church of Scotland, no one could have expected a moderator-designate to announce, as Miss Kesting did in an interview with *The Sunday Times*, that one of her priorities will be to fight for the introduction of "gay weddings" by Church of Scotland ministers.

A newspaper in the Western Isles, from which the above was quoted, has taken an interest in Miss Kesting, as she was brought up in Stornoway and

licensed by the local Church of Scotland Presbytery. One more recent member of that Presbytery has pointed out that “all Church of Scotland ministers (Miss Kesting included) take vows at their ordination in which they reply in the affirmative to questions which include the following: ‘Do you believe the Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the supreme rule of faith and life?’ and, ‘Do you promise to seek the unity and peace of this Church?’ I think most Evangelicals find it hard to understand how liberals in the Kirk, who are set on denying so many of the doctrines of the Word of God, can reconcile these vows with their own position. And certainly, as the issue of civil partnerships is the most divisive in the Kirk for years, it is hard to see how a Moderator can be seeking the unity and peace of the Kirk by promoting such a visibly-divisive issue.”

This Lewis minister makes good points, but what he does not mention is the fact that Church of Scotland ministers at ordination take their vows under the shelter of the Articles Declaratory, which allow “due regard to liberty of opinion in points which do not enter into the substance of the faith”. And this liberty has been stretched till, as is now the case, there can be almost nothing in an individual minister’s creed which would be considered heretical.

More recently it was something of a relief to learn that most Church of Scotland presbyteries – 36 out of 42 so far, with four others still to come to a conclusion – have opposed a proposal, sent down to them from last year’s General Assembly, to give ministers the right to bless civil partnerships without fear of discipline. It is estimated that this represents a two-to-one majority of individual presbytery members against the proposal. It is disturbing, however, that the reaction of “senior Church insiders” is that the vote makes it clear to those seeking such a blessing *where they will be received sympathetically*. Scriptural discipline has indeed fallen in the streets.

It is also clear the Church of Scotland has drifted far from the profession in its Articles Declaratory – albeit qualified, as quoted above, so as to evacuate it of definite meaning – that it “adheres to the principles of the Protestant Reformation. The Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is its supreme rule of faith and life.”

### **Homosexual Adoption**

The Scottish Parliament has passed a law permitting unmarried couples and homosexual couples to adopt children. The wickedness of such a law is very great, and we tremble for the consequences. It is not without cause that God has recorded in His Word that He turned Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes as “*an example* unto those that should afterwards live ungodly” (2 Pet 2:6). The motion in Parliament was carried by a large majority.

One homosexual MSP argued for homosexual adoption on the grounds of evolution, and it is no surprise to see immorality and evolutionism going hand in hand. If homosexuality were genetic, as some people argue, one would have thought that “millions of years of evolution” would have eliminated genes which had such a tendency *not* to replicate. The truth is that homosexual behaviour is largely cultural and its current prevalence is a feature of an abandoned society, given up by God “to uncleanness” and “to vile affections” (Rom 1:24,26).

Nevertheless there is no reason why people ensnared in homosexuality should not be converted. In which case they will forsake their sin, though they may be tempted at times to return to it. Some of the Corinthians had been “effeminate” and “abusers of themselves with mankind”, but now they were washed, they were sanctified, they were justified “in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:9,11). Christians should pray for homosexual acquaintances they may have, and pray too for the hastening of that day when the laws of our nation will be restored to the biblical pattern. *DWBS*

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## **Church Information**

### **Synod Statement**

A pro re nata meeting (one called to handle unforeseen business) of the Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland was held on 5 and 6 December 2006. It was called to consider various matters which originated in the Northern Presbytery in connection with Rev A J Macdonald and a book which he wrote and distributed.

The Synod decided, in response to a petition before it, to appoint a committee to frame a libel against Mr Macdonald (the libel will be a formal indictment by which he will be charged with misconduct). The Synod also directed Mr Macdonald to apologise, before January 12, for an attack in his book on another minister and to acknowledge the validity of the status of that minister. In response to another libel, referred to it by the Northern Presbytery, the Synod decided that the Presbytery should proceed with it according to the laws of the Church.

### **Nurses Wanted for Sengera**

Applications are invited for two nursing posts at Omerembe Clinic, Sengera, Kenya. Applicants should have midwifery as well as general nursing training. In the first instance, contact Rev J R Tallach, F P Manse, Raasay, Kyle, Ross-shire, IV40 8PB.